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Mismatch in working hours and affective commitment

Differential relationships for distinct employee groups

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examined the relationship between two types of mismatch (i.e. non-correspondence between preferred and actual number of hours), and affective commitment. It was argued that specific groups of employees, i.e. women and part-time working employees, attach more importance to their working hours and, therefore, are less likely to show affective commitment when they experience a mismatch.

Design/methodology/approach – Using data from 222 employees of a Dutch Ministry, hypotheses were tested using regression analyses.

Findings – It was shown that a mismatch of working more hours was differentially related to the affective commitment of employees who wanted to work more and who wanted to work fewer hours. Moreover, gender and full-time status were found to moderate the negative relationship between a mismatch and the affective commitment of employees who wants to work less.

Research limitations/implications – The focus is on affective commitment; however, it is possible that other types of commitment are also associated with perceptions of psychological contract breach.

Practical implications – Tailored HRM is needed: assisting employees with a mismatch wanting to work fewer hours can be achieved by allowing them more flexibility in their working schedules. Employees with a mismatch of wanting to work more hours can be assisted with additional support, e.g. shopping services.

Originality/value – HRM practices can be tailored to different preferences: the value of this paper is the examination of different types of mismatch for different group of employees.

Keywords Hours of work, Psychological contracts, Job satisfaction

Paper type Research paper

A majority of the contemporary workforce prefers to work a different number of hours than they actually work: most employees want to spend less time at work, although there are also employees who want to increase their hours (Reynolds, 2003). Much of the research on work hours has focused on overtime since employees increasingly are asked to work longer hours or to work more days each week and to maintain this pace

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for longer periods in their working (Babbar and Aspelin, 1998; Crouter *et al.*, 2001; Feldman, 2002). The focus of most of these studies was on the adverse consequences of overtime for health and well-being. For instance, studies have shown that overtime may easily result in short run drawbacks, such as work place injuries and illnesses (Savery and Luks, 2000), and in long-term effects of excessive working hours, e.g. impairment of employee mental and physical health (Sparks *et al.*, 1997). A growing share of workers is overemployed, that is they are thought to be willing but unable to reduce their hours in exchange for less income at their current jobs. Also, employees may feel compelled to work more hours because of financial strain, job insecurity, or employer pressure. Even if these long working hours are voluntarily it has been stressed that they can undermine the very quality of living standards they are presumed to boost (Golden and Figart, 2000).

Most frequently, working long hours is referred to as overtime and often a distinction is made between mandatory and voluntary overtime. Mandatory or involuntary overtime refers to compelling, forcing, or more subtle ways of persuading employees to work hours beyond agreed upon assignments. Voluntary overtime refers to working long hours that employees are willingly to exchange for higher income, but also to willingness to work extra hours, which do not bring direct compensation (Feldman, 2002). Because it is difficult to separate different types of involuntary and voluntary overtime, we will use the term mismatch of wanting to work fewer hours.

Generally, mismatch of working hours refers to the lack of correspondence between working hour's preferences and actual working hours, whether this is wanting to work more hours of wanting to working fewer hours. Most attention has been directed to mismatches related to working more hours than preferred. These studies typically compare the relationships between overtime and various antecedents and consequences. For instance, Engellandt and Riphahn (2005), recently showed in their study among Swiss employees, that the propensity to work unpaid overtime increases significantly with age and education, is higher for males and for married employees, and positively correlated with tenure. Rau and Triemer (2004) found in their comparison between employees working overtime and employees work regular hours, that employees working overtime were found to have a disturbed ability to recover and sleep disturbances compared with the group working regular hours.

Previous studies that have examined the relationship between mismatch and employee outcomes for different groups of employees are sparse. One of these studies is the study of Stamper and Van Dyne (2001). They surveyed 257 service employees and tested differences in the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) of full- and part-time employees and showed that part-time employees exhibited less helping OCB than full-time employees. Another study is the study of Van Emmerik (2005) among a sample of university and printing works employees where the relationship between unwanted overtime and engagement in OCBs directed toward supervisor and colleagues was examined. Both of these studies only examined these relationships for mismatches in working more hours than preferred. However, mismatches between preferences and actual working hours can take different forms. Some full-time workers may wish they could work fewer hours, whereas other full-timers may want to work more hours. Just as there might be part-timers who want to work more hours and part-timers who would like to work even fewer hours. We will elaborate on different relationships between mismatches of working hours (working more than one prefers

and working less than one prefers) and outcomes, and in the present study both types of mismatches are taken into account.

Further, both of these studies (Stamper and Van Dyne, 2001; Van Emmerik, 2005) examined the relationship between mismatch of working hours and OCBs. It is, however, possible that OCB is not the most adequate outcome variable. Since an employee needs more time to engage in more OCBs it is different to differentiate between these two concepts. For instance, employees who experience a mismatch and want to work more hours may experience this mismatch, at least partly, because they do not have enough time to engage in OCB. Therefore, in the present study, we will not look at OCBs but examine the relationship between mismatches in working hours and affective commitment. Affective commitment is usually defined as the willingness to contribute to the common good, or as the degree to which employees feel connected to their work and to the organization, employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Porter *et al.*, 1974; Steers, 1977). We use affective commitment because we expect that especially this type of attitudinal investment is associated with perceptions of psychological contract breach.

In the present study, we also will examine if different groups of employees (i.e. men versus women, part-time versus full-time working employees) show less affective commitment when they experience a mismatch of working hours and if it is important to differentiate between working less than one prefers or working more than one prefers and we will elaborate on these issues in the next paragraphs.

Mismatches of working hours

Work is increasingly changing into a short-term contract culture with long hours, intrinsic job insecurity and declining sense of loyalty by employees to their employer (Cooper, 1999). Many employees feel they are unable to meet the increasing demands and expectations of time dedicated to paid work because of their non-paid caring commitments. Moreover, they may find they are increasingly isolated from family and leisure activities by an increasing climate of long hours and working intensity (Lewis *et al.*, 2003).

Actual work hour behavior can be seen as a function of hours preferred by the employee, number of hours as agreed in the employment contract and environmental forces (e.g. the home situation). The resulting working long hours may not reflect employee preferences (Clarkberg and Moen, 2001a, b) and is referred to as a mismatch of working hours.

One of the perspectives to explain the association between a mismatch in working hours and decreased affective commitment is the psychological contract breach perspective. Since the 1990s, the psychological contract has received renewed attention, mainly initiated by the seminal work of Rousseau (1989, #58) and Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998, #59 and 89). According to Rousseau (1989) the psychological contract is an individual's belief in the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party. The term psychological contract (Robinson *et al.*, 1994; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998) refers to the implicit expectations of employers and employees concerning each other's behavior and obligations. For instance, even though it is not specified in the formal employment contract, employers expect employees to be committed to the organization, contribute as

much as possible to the organizational goals and prepared to work “above and beyond” the letter of their formal employment contract (Hartley *et al.*, 1995). On the other hand, employees expect their employer to be loyal, promote them in the long run, and due to the process of individualization, take their preferences for atypical employment contracts into account. When employers do so, it can be expected that employees – given the reciprocity inherent in the psychological contract – will be more committed to the organization.

Previous studies have demonstrated that perceived breach of the psychological contract can be associated with negative attitudes (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Robinson, 1996; Turnley and Feldman, 2000), for instance, decreased job satisfaction, decreased organizational commitment, and increased intentions to leave the organization. Moreover, the severity of the employee’s reaction will in part be determined by the importance the employee placed on the breached outcome (Kickul *et al.*, 2004; Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Concerning the consequences of the psychological contract, Tsui *et al.* (1997) found that employees are more committed to the organization when the employer over-invests, or offers more than the employee expects. In the case of mutual investments, this over-investment means that the employer’s offer meets the employee’s expectations. When employees observe that their preferences are being taken seriously, they will feel more obligation and commitment toward the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Given these arguments, not taking employees’ preferences for working hours into account can be seen as a form of under-investment because it fails to meet the employees’ expectations.

In the current study, the assumption is made that when employers are prepared to seriously consider the preferences of employees concerning the number of working hours, employees will consider the psychological contract fulfilled and will be more satisfied with their employment contract (Robinson *et al.*, 1994; Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). Furthermore, we also expect that the more employers try to accommodate employees’ preferences, the more employees will be satisfied with their employment contract, and the more committed they will be to the organization. This expectation is largely in line with previous research. For instance, research of Krausz *et al.* (1995) showed that employees who prefer to work less and actually have a part-time employment contract are more satisfied than employees who have a mismatch of working hours. Similarly, the study of Krausz *et al.* (2000) showed that well-being was lower for nurses who wanted to work less than they actually did.

Another theoretical perspective that can be used to study mismatches is the equity or balance perspective (Adams, 1963). It can also be argued that the output/input ratio will be perceived as unequal and that employees will strive to restore this inequity. Inequity occurs when – to the perception of employees – the employer has failed to fulfill adequately promised obligations (Arnold, 1996; Coyle-Shapiro, 2002). This is a distressing experience for employees and it may strengthen employees’ beliefs that obligations agreed upon are violated (Robinson, 1996). In the present study, we take a specific instance of experienced inequity, namely when employees indicate that there is a mismatch in working hours and consequently they experience that they are putting in more effort than they feel obliged to their employer. Confronted with this experienced inequity, employees can attempt to regain costs by decreasing their efforts or by trying to increase employer’s obligations. It seems likely that inequity especially affects decreases in contributions, more than for instance trying to increase obligations.

For employees may find adjusting own contributions the most feasible reaction, since they may perceive themselves as powerless to effect change in their employers' behavior. Accordingly they will adjust their own contributions in order to restore the balance (Robinson *et al.*, 1994; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Generally, studies support this idea: the perception of inequity has been shown to be related with various reduced job investments, such as dissatisfaction and turnover (Robinson *et al.*, 1994; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994) and Robinson (1996) found a negative association for perceived inequity with employees' performance, their civic virtue behavior, and their intentions to remain with the organization. Other studies also show that inequity is associated with less job investments, e.g. less commitment and lower job performance (Lester *et al.*, 2002), and more dissatisfaction, more thoughts of quitting, and more actual turnover (Bunderson, 2001).

- H1. The smaller the mismatch of working hours, the higher the affective commitment.

Importance attached to working conditions

To some extent, a mismatch between preferences and actual working hours are a function of personal characteristics. Reynolds (2003) gives some examples of employees with different preferences: employees with no childcare responsibilities can be very content with long working hours, since they are likely to have relatively few family responsibilities. In contrast, employees with young children may find that working forty hours a week is nearly impossible to accomplish. People may also prefer different numbers of hours. Thus, in the present study, we will specifically examine the preferences of different employee groups.

It may well be that those employees that attach more value to their working conditions, such as number of hours work, will be affected more seriously by perceived contract breach brought about by for instance long hours or mandatory overtime, and consequently will be more likely to reduce their contributions more drastic. Another explanation, according to Stamper and Van Dyne (2001), is that part-time employees generally receive less training and advancement opportunities than full-time employees. Thus, when employees work more hours, there is more opportunity for employer investments to accrue benefits to the organization. Conversely, when employees work fewer hours, benefits are also likely to be reduced. Consequently, employers are less likely to provide extra inducements to part-time workers. Given these fewer inducements, Stamper and Van Dyne argued that part-time employees have less reason to show their attachment to the organization.

Previous research on psychological contract violation has shown that unmet expectations are likely to be associated with unfavorable job attitudes. While these consequences are clearly negative and detrimental to organizational effectiveness, Chrobot Mason (2003) suggests that violations of the psychological contract made specifically to certain groups of employees may provoke even stronger, emotion-laden feelings that accompany lost hope and disillusionment. Preferences may vary with such characteristics as gender, age, family structure, income, opportunities for advancement, and part-time status (Reynolds, 2003). In the next paragraphs, we will elaborate on these issues for two specific groups of employees: gender and employment status, because we expect that especially women and part-timers will attach more

value to working the preferred number of working hours and consequently will be more sensitive to a mismatch.

Gender

Employees may react differently to a mismatch of working hours. Specifically, it can be expected that those who attach most importance to working conditions, will be affected more negatively by inequity than those who attach less importance to the number of hours worked. Women's time commitments to paid employment are more influenced by the need to reserve time for dependent care and other family responsibilities than holds for men (Fagan, 2001). Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence that the burden of dependent care falls disproportionally on women, e.g. women are more likely than men to restructure their work activities around family needs (Buffardi *et al.*, 1999). Stier and Lewin-Epstein (2003) also argued that social expectations and actual employment patterns of men and women require that their preferences regarding hours of work are evaluated separately: preferences for adding or reducing number of working hours can take on a different meaning for men as compared to women because they work longer hours on average. Further, factors that affect number of working hours are frequently quite different for men and women.

What we refer to is not gender per-se, but being the major person in domestic child care – so it can be single parents, not just single mothers. But since domestic and child-care responsibilities in their families most frequently are the prime responsibility of women, it is expected that especially women find it more important that the number of hours does not exceed the number of hours agreed upon in the employment contract. Consequently, we expect that women will evaluate a mismatch of working hours more negatively than men. Therefore, in the present study it is anticipated that women, will be more sensitive to violations of the number of working hours, such that this specific type of inequity will have greater negative impact on their job contributions.

- H2. The negative relationship between a mismatch of working hours and affective commitment will be stronger for women than for men.

Employment status

Part-time work seems to be an obvious option for dealing with work overload. Part-time employees are acknowledged to differ in several aspects from full-time employees, and frequently attitudinal and behavioral differences between part-time and full-time employees are supposed (Sinclair *et al.*, 1999). Conway and Briner (2002) gave a number of reasons for supposing that part-time employees may have a different psychological contract than full-time employees. These differences can be located at the organizational level (e.g. differential treatment by the employer), at the individual level (e.g. different career orientations), at the interpersonal level (e.g. differential treatment by supervisor and colleagues), or can refer to the reduced time spent in the workplace. Given that most part-time working employees nowadays explicitly choose to work fewer hours, the time commitments of part-time working employees may also be different from that of full-time employees for this specific aspect. It is likely, that part-time employees will find it more important that the number of working hours does not exceed the number of hours that is agreed upon in the employment contract. Thus, those who attach more importance to working the agreed upon hours, i.e. part-time working employees, will be affected more negatively by inequity than those who value

specific work conditions less. And, consequently, the perception of this specific type of inequity has greater impact on the reduction of contributions of part-time working employees than on the contributions of full-time working employees.

- H3.* The negative relationship between a mismatch of working hours and affective commitment will be stronger for part-time working than for full-time working employees.

Method

Participants

A total of 266 employees (a response of 38 percent) participated in this study[1]. All respondents (combination of rank and file, professionals, and managers) were employees within a Dutch Ministry. After the questionnaires with missing values on the research variables were removed, a total of 222 remained: 153 men (69 percent) and 69 women (31 percent). The mean age of the male respondents was 46 years ($SD = 8.7$) and mean years on the job for this group was 4.5 ($SD = 4.7$). The mean age of the female respondents was 39.7 years ($SD = 8.3$) and mean year on the job was 3.9 ($SD = 3.6$). Of the employees with a mismatch 40 expressed they wanted to work fewer hours (28 men and 12 women) and 94 opted for more hours (70 men and 24 women). Mismatches were found in both part-time en full-time groups. Somewhat surprisingly, only ten of the part-timers wanted to work more hours, but there were 84 full-timers that wanted to work more hours.

Measures

Affective commitment was measured using five items adopted from Allen and Meyer (1990). An example is "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization" (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely disagree). Cronbach's α of this scale was 0.70. The items were summed and divided by the number of items.

A question was asked how many hours they prefer to work, and how many hours they agreed in the employment contract. A mismatch of hours was computed by subtracting the number of hours agreed in the employment contract from the preferred number of working hours from the number, whereby 0 = no mismatch. For the analyses we made a distinction between those who wanted to work fewer hours and those who expressed that they wanted to work more hours.

Gender was measured using 0 = male and 1 = female. Full-time employment status was measured using 0 = working part-time (full-time employment at the ministry is 36 hours per week) and 1 = working full-time. Education and job tenure were used as controls. Educational level was measured in years completed education. Job tenure, measured in years, was controlled for because employees with less organizational tenure are perhaps somewhat less committed to their organization (Feldman, 2002).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are reported in Table I.

At the univariate level affective commitment is only related to a mismatch for working fewer hours ($r = 0.23^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). Two hierarchical regression analyses were performed for affective commitment; one for employees experiencing mismatch because they want to work fewer hours less versus the remainder of the population,

and one analysis for employees experiencing mismatch because they want to work more versus the remainder of the population. We performed two different analyses because simultaneously modeling interactions for both wanting to work fewer hours and wanting to work more hours in one analysis would lead to difficult interpretability of the results.

Table II shows the results of the regression analyses. Analysis 1 in Table II shows the results for no mismatch and mismatch and analysis 2 in Table II shows the results for no mismatch and mismatch because of wanting to work more hours. Further, separate analyses were run for men and women and for part-timers versus full-timers. To test specifically for interaction effects, the variables were entered in two steps. In step 1, gender, job tenure, education, full-time employment status, and extent of mismatch were entered. In step 2, the product variables, computed by multiplying extent of mismatch with full-time employment status, and multiplying extent of mismatch with gender were added.

H1 specified that the smaller the mismatch of working hours, the higher the affective commitment. This hypothesis is not supported for analysis 1: those who want to work fewer hours are not less committed. This hypothesis is supported for analysis 2: those who want to work more hours, and thus experience a mismatch between agreed and preferred working hours more hours, are more committed ($b = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$).

H2 specified a negative relationship between a mismatch of working hours and affective commitment that is expected to be stronger for women than for men. For analysis 1 the specified interaction between a mismatch and gender is significant ($b = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$). Inspection of separate regression analyses for men and women showed that the slope of the regression equation for men ($b = -0.03$, $p < 0.05$) was negative, whereas that for women is non-significant ($b = 0.05$, ns). Thus, contrary to the expected relationship, the negative relationship between mismatch and affective commitment appeared to be stronger for men than for women. For analysis 2 the interaction between mismatch and gender is not significant. Thereby, *H2* is not supported and rejected for both analysis 1 and 2.

H3 specified that the negative relationship between a mismatch of working hours and affective commitment will be stronger for part-time working than for full-time working employees. For analysis 1 the specified interaction between a mismatch and full-time employment status is significant ($b = 0.12$, $p < 0.01$). Inspection of separate regression analyses for full-timers and part-timers showed that the slope of the

| | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------------|-------|------|--------|---------|---------|-------|-------|---------|
| Affective commitment | 4.40 | 0.94 | | | | | | |
| Gender | 0.31 | 0.46 | -0.07 | | | | | |
| Job tenure | 4.32 | 4.39 | 0.07 | -0.06 | | | | |
| Education | 15.32 | 2.29 | 0.04 | -0.12 | -0.29** | | | |
| Full-time | 0.84 | 0.37 | 0.05 | -0.40** | 0.08 | 0.00 | | |
| Wants more hours | 1.18 | 3.95 | -0.10 | -0.05 | 0.08 | 0.03 | 0.07 | |
| Wants fewer hours | 1.85 | 2.51 | 0.23** | -0.15* | -0.11 | 0.13* | 0.14* | -0.22** |

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table I.
Means, standard
deviations, and
correlations ($N = 222$)

Table II.
Results of regression
analyses for affective
commitment
(unstandardized
regression coefficients
for step 1 and the
interaction coefficients
from step 2 are presented)

| | Analysis 1 | | | | Analysis 2 | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|---|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Analysis for no mismatch and mismatch because of wanting to work fewer hours | | | | Analysis for no mismatch and mismatch of wanting to work more hours | | | | | |
| | Total (N = 222) | Part-time (N = 35) | Full-time (N = 187) | Men (N = 153) | Women (N = 69) | Total (N = 222) | Part-time (N = 35) | Full-time (N = 187) | Men (N = 153) | Women (N = 69) |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | -0.09 | -0.03 | -0.08 | | | -0.04 | 0.11 | -0.03 | | |
| Job tenure | 0.02 | -0.04 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.02 | -0.05 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.06 |
| Education | 0.03 | -0.04 | 0.04 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.02 | -0.07 | 0.03 | -0.01 | 0.08 |
| Full-time | 0.10 | | | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.02 | | | 0.05 | 0.05 |
| Mismatch (# of hours) | -0.03 | -0.26** | -0.02 | -0.03* | 0.05 | 0.09** | 0.13 | 0.08** | 0.09** | 0.07 |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| Full-time*mismatch | -0.30** | | | | | -0.04 | | | | |
| Gender*mismatch | 0.12** | | | | | -0.01 | | | | |
| R ² step 1 | 0.02 | 0.20 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.07 | 0.06** | 0.10 | 0.06* | 0.07* | 0.07 |
| F | 1.10 | 1.86 | 1.10 | 1.10 | 1.19 | 2.91 | 0.79 | 3.05 | 2.73 | 1.29 |
| R ² step 2 | 0.04** | | | | | 0.00 | | | | |
| F change | 4.64 | | | | | 0.09 | | | | |
| Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ | | | | | | | | | | |

regression equation for part-timers ($b = -0.26, p < 0.01$) was negative, whereas that for part-timers was non-significant ($b = -0.03, ns$). Thus, as expected the negative relationship between mismatch and affective commitment appeared to be stronger for part-timers than for full-timers. For analysis 2 the interaction between mismatch and gender is not significant. Thereby, *H3* is supported for analysis 1 but not for analysis 2.

Discussion

In the present study, the association of a specific instance of psychological contract breach, i.e. mismatch of working hours, with commitment was examined. Contrary to our expectations, overall those who want to work fewer hours do not show less commitment. Those who express that they want to work more hours, showed (unexpected) more affective commitment. To examine these relationships more in depth, we examined differences for women and part-time employees, representing employees who attach particularly importance to the number of hours they work. Men and part-timers appeared to be more sensitive to a mismatch of wanting to work fewer hours than women and full-timers. A mismatch of wanting to work fewer hours, as an instance of inequity, is most strongly (negatively) associated with the reduction of commitment of part-timers. The association of a mismatch because of wanting to work more hours with affective commitment, is most strongly (positively) associated for part-timers and men.

Practical implications

The results of the present study have a number of practical implications for organizations seeking to lessen the negative consequences of mismatches, and which want to promote commitment. Long working hours generally do not reflect employee preferences, but frequently result from today's workplaces, but that does not hold for all employees (Clarkberg and Moen, 2001a, b).

An unexpected finding of this study was that a high percentage of the full-timers experienced a mismatch of working hours and most of this group wanted to work not fewer, but on the contrary they wanted to work more hours. This is contrary to the idea that a growing share of workers is overemployed and that they are thought to be willing but unable to reduce their hours. The results of the present study show that it is important that managers pay attention to managing beliefs regarding mutual obligations and, in particular, to how employees may regard working hours that they do not prefer. Although the findings of the present study stress that being required to work another number of hours than preferred can fuel resentment expressed in decreased commitment, e.g. among those who would rather have more time off (Babbar and Aspelin, 1998), this is not necessarily the case. The study of Worrall and Cooper (1999) showed that employees acknowledged the adverse effects of working more than preferred on health, morale, productivity, and their family lives, but many still felt compelled to work long hours. Thus, as the present results show, the fact that employees work long hours may not necessarily mean that they resent doing it.

If working more hours than preferred and agreed upon is unavoidable, it is important that organizations provide realistic job previews; to make it less likely that employees will perceive inequities. An important implication of this study is that it provides additional support for the value of realistic job previews. It can be

important too, for organizations to get their employees to appreciate working overtime more by offering enough material compensation or by offering special fringe benefits. Also, it is important to decide how overtime can best be scheduled, on what basis, and for whom, in order to get the job done effectively (Babbar and Aspelin, 1998).

Moreover, the results highlight that a mismatch in working hours is associated with affective commitment. Specifically, the results suggest that employees that prefer to work fewer hours show less affective commitment, whereas employees who work more hours than they prefer appear to become more committed. These results stress the idea that it is important to distinguish between different types of mismatch. Managers should be aware of the importance of the type of mismatch. Our results suggest that mismatches of wanting to work fewer hours are more detrimental to affective commitment compared with mismatches of wanting to work more hours. When managers value employee affective commitment of employees with a mismatch of wanting to work less hours, they should look how to realize that these employees can do their work within their preferences. For instance, by assisting these employees to reduce their working hours or allowing them more flexibility in their working schedules. Conversely, when managers value affective commitment of employees with a mismatch of wanting to work more hours, they should look how to realize these preferences without giving long-term adverse consequences of working overtime having the upper hand. For instance, by assisting these employees with additional support, e.g. shopping services, supplementary childcare/elderly care facilities.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Some words of caution regarding the results of this study are necessary. The cross-sectional design precludes causal relationships. Further, the data were collected using self-report measures, and common method variance can easily become a problem within such designs. The differential associations of the two types of mismatch and affective commitment make this less likely. Future research efforts need to consider using longitudinal and multi-actor data, for instance, information on both supervisor and employee. There can be a selection bias. For instance, employees who do not leave an organization for which they have to work more hours than they prefer, might be the high committed conformists or might not have the resources to find another job. This can lead to an underestimation of the effects.

In the present study, we focused on affective commitment because we expected that especially this type of attitudinal investment is associated with perceptions of psychological contract breach. However, it is possible that other types of commitment are also associated with perceptions of psychological contract breach. For instance, the normative component of commitment refers to employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990) and this sense of obligation to remain in an organization might derive from the same work conditions that create a desire to remain (Meyer and Smith, 2000). Continuance commitment refers to commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Typically, employees scoring high on continuance commitment do not only experience few opportunities to leave the organization, but also might have invested a lot in the organization. We recommend that future research

consider additional factors (such as perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, and normative commitment) that also may be linked to a mismatch in working hours.

The relatively weak relationship between both types of mismatch and affective commitment provides perhaps some evidence that employees are generally not blaming their organization for breaches of their psychological contract. If they were blaming their organizations for asking too much of them, one would expect the correlation between mismatches and affective commitment to be more strongly negative (Turnley *et al.*, 2003). Additionally, it must be acknowledged that the sample size was rather small and this may have affected the statistical power: a larger sample size would have provided greater power to detect additional effects not detected in the current study (e.g. interaction effects). For instance, if we had had a larger sample and more organizations, it would also have been possible to compare the relationships of the different organizational settings for affective commitment extensively, in order to determine whether the organizational setting has a stronger association of commitment than the individual level variables we used in the present study. Suggestions for addressing these problems in future research, besides having a greater sample size and investigating more organizations, include basing the search for moderator variables on substantive individual and organizational level theories, and paying more attention to the interplay of individual and organizational level variables and their association with affective commitment.

Note

1. This is a bit low response rate and this can be caused by the length of the questionnaire (Roth and BeVier, 2002). However, it has also been reported that outside the US the response rates are likely to be lower than inside the US (Baruch, 1999). More specifically, responses around 40 percent are common value found for the Netherlands in the last decades (Van der Gaag, 2005).

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Further reading

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